

efforts, and Dr. Coues of late both with tongue and pen has expressed his disapproval of this article and advocated its suppression. Let it therefore be eliminated from the Code. Let us instead of listening to its baneful teachings, advocate the beauties of grammatical construction, and the propriety of correct spelling and we will do more towards the stability of ornithological nomenclature than any number of Canons XL, which teach the rightfulness of wrongdoing. The writer has always repudiated this Canon. He will always spell as well as he knows how, and will be as grammatical in his writings as he is able and will always reject misshaped compounds and ill-spelt words, and when he errs and blunders he is thankful to the kind friend who sets him right upon his way, and he would strongly advise all young ornithologists, beginning the study of the most attractive of earth's creatures, to reject entirely this Canon XL and its advocacy of illiteracy, and when uncertain of any portion of their writings consult some one who can aid them, but in all cases, adopt only that which is grammatically, typographically and philologically correct.



A DEFENSE OF CANON XL OF THE A. O. U. CODE.

BY J. A. ALLEN.

IN THE foregoing article Mr. Elliot has, let us say unwittingly, given a very unfair representation of the purpose and results of Canon XL of the A. O. U. Code of Nomenclature. The members of the A. O. U. Committee who formulated Canon XL, instead of deliberately offering "a reward to ignorance, carelessness, and a general lack of ability to perceive that which alone is proper and right," are probably as much shocked by misspelled or wrongly constructed names in scientific nomenclature as is Mr. Elliot, and did not adopt Canon XL without careful deliberation and consideration as to which of two grave evils is the lesser,—

namely, the emendation of thousands of names, some of them so radically that they retain little resemblance to their original forms, or the retention of a few gross and shocking verbal malformations against which their literary instincts must ever revolt.

In the formation of the A. O. U. Code stability in nomenclature was the primary end sought, which is the avowed purpose of all modern codes of nomenclature; and the authors of this code find themselves in most excellent company in the stand taken on the subject of emendation of names. They include a long list of authors who are eminent as scholars as well as naturalists, and "who know how to spell" in quite as many languages as Mr. Elliot and his few sympathizers in the matter of this "extraordinary" Canon XL. To charge the A. O. U. Committee with placing a premium on illiteracy through the adoption of Canon XL, as Mr. Elliot and Dr. Coues have done, is almost too absurd for serious consideration, as the article itself and the discussion and remarks thereunder abundantly show, to say nothing of the eight pages or more of the Code (pp. 58-66) devoted to 'Recommendations for Zoölogical Nomenclature in the Future,' treating especially of the selection and construction of names. Under Canon XL it is said: "The permanence of a name is of far more importance than its signification or structure, as is freely admitted by the best authorities in both Botany and Zoölogy. Your Committee therefore restrict the emendation of names to the correction of obvious or known typographical errors . . . They would therefore reject emendations of a purely philological character, and especially all such as involve a change of the initial letter of the name, as in cases where the Greek aspirate has been omitted by the original constructor. It therefore follows that hybrid names [anagrams, 'nonsense names,' and barbarous or 'exotic' names] cannot be displaced; although it is to be hoped that they will be strenuously guarded against in future; and that, in general, word-coiners will pay the closest attention to philological proprieties."

Nearly all modern codes of nomenclature agree that "A name is only a name and need have no necessary significance." In other words, while anagrams, hybrid names, nonsense names (many such have been purposely constructed), and barbarous

or indigenous names should be avoided in future, those already in existence are not to be either rejected or emended, but treated as simply "arbitrary combinations of letters."

On the other hand, extremists of the school Mr. Elliot represents will tolerate only words of classical origin, or at least of Latin form, and of correct philological construction. One might infer from Mr. Elliot's remarks that this correct philological form was a very simple matter to attain; that there was but one allowable rule for transliteration from other languages into Latin; that all scholars who "know how to spell" are agreed on the proper methods of compounding names under all circumstances; that philological authorities were never at loggerheads as to the correct construction of names of doubtful etymology (of which there are many); and that emended and re-emended emendations were never heard of. Simple indeed, were all this true, would be this troublesome matter of "knowing how to spell" in a manner to please everybody.

Between the rejection of names on account of their non-classical origin, the emendation of classical terms improperly constructed, even to their complete transformation to practically new words, and the thousand and one slighter changes that do not to any material extent alter the original word, there is no point at which a line can be drawn—the whole field is thrown open to individual predilection, with no arbiter to decide between conflicting authorities, and no prospect of agreement in tastes or preferences, where more constructions than one chance to be allowable. Mr. Elliot may prefer one 'spelling,' Dr. Coues another. The result would be endless emendation and constant instability, each 'good speller' following his own preferences as to whether or not a name is too bad to be tolerated, or whether it may not be accepted after the proper amount of "tidying up." In many cases it is purely a matter of choice, as custom goes, whether a certain word from the Greek shall be spelled with a *c* or a *k*, an *i* or a *y*, an *i* or a *j*, etc.; while the etymology of many terms of questionable meaning and construction is a matter of pure guesswork.

The extent of the breach advocated by Mr. Elliot is probably far greater than he supposes. Mr. Waterhouse's 'Index Generum Avium,' published in 1889, gives a list of about 7000 names

employed as generic or subgeneric terms for birds between this date and 1766. A careful examination of the first 60 pages of the work (about one fourth) shows that about one eighth of the names there entered are merely variants or emendations of other names, while very many other variants have here escaped record. It also appears that some names have received as many as three or four renderings at the hands of as many expert 'spellers'; that in some cases the same author has spelled names of his own coining in two and sometimes in three different ways; in one instance, at least, using the masculine, in another the feminine, and in still another the neuter form of the word; that German and French writers have apparently certain national preferences in respect to the transliteration of Greek into Latin; that some prefer the full or expanded form in compounding names and others an abridged form, for the sake of brevity. Thus we have *Anthreptes*, *Anthorheptes*, *Anthothreptus*, and *Anthothreptes*; *Anodorhynchus* and *Anodontorhynchus*; *Baryphonus* and *Barryphonus*; *Bessornis* and *Bessonornis*; *Bradornis* and *Bradyornis*; *Calornis* and *Calliornis*; *Calurus* and *Calliurus*; *Caliptorhynchus* and *Caliptorrhynchus*; *Calopsitta* and *Callipsittacus*; *Cephalepis* and *Cephallepis*; *Cephus* and *Cepphus*; *Chroicocephalus*, *Chræcocephalus*, and *Croocephalus*, etc. But space cannot be given, nor is it necessary, for the further illustration of this and other cases where custom varies in respect to connective vowels, the doubling of consonants, as *l* and *r*, or the interchange of *ai*, *æ*, and *æ*, of *i*, *y*, and *j*, or of *c* and *k*, or the retention or the omission of the Greek aspirate, etc.

Aside from these simple classes of variants, affecting probably at least an eighth of all the generic and specific names in zoölogy, the 'purist,' like certain German and some other authors that could be named, totally rejects not only hybrid names and names consisting of arbitrary combinations of letters, but all names based on indigenous appellations, as the native names of animals. To show what changes this implies, it may be stated that in the Psittaci alone the names of not less than 15 genera and subgenera out of a total of 72, were rejected not long since by a single author on the ground of faulty construction or barbarous origin, in several cases new names being given in place of the

name rejected, and in other cases the earliest synonym that chanced to meet the author's approval was taken.

It was to avoid this uncertainty and instability that Canon XL was devised, which in reality is only the enforcement of the law of priority, literally as well as in spirit, to its finality, applying it to the *form* of the name as well as to the name itself. There can be no safe line of limitation in the case of emendation, where there are so many who pose as good spellers and yet so often spell the same name differently. In the only exception made — that of “obvious or known typographical errors” — the critics of Canon XL profess to see a great absurdity, although its meaning is sufficiently defined. By ‘obvious’ is of course meant the evident transposition of letters, or their inversion, overlooked in proof-reading; by ‘known’ cases where the error, clerical or typographical, has been corrected by the author himself, either later in the same publication, as in the index or by means of an errata slip, or elsewhere. The exception thus does not open “a very wide door for the exercise of individual opinion,” nor are the known cases of such errors so rare as Mr. Elliot seems to suppose.

Mr. Elliot asks regarding Canon XL: “Has it accomplished the result contemplated or desired? Is nomenclature by its assertions a greater fixity to-day than when this rule was promulgated? Do those who know better accept bad spelling and employ ungrammatical phrases, because it advises them so to do? . . . Has it made any converts among educated men?” etc. In answer it may be said that it has not accomplished all that was desired, but far more in the line of its realization than its most sanguine advocates dared hope. It has practically thus far rendered fixed and permanent the nomenclature of North American ornithology, in North America at least, in so far as the emendation or rejection of names upon purely philological grounds is concerned. It has among its supporters and advocates so nearly all of the leading authorities in vertebrate zoölogy in this country (they must include *some* “educated men”) that the few who reject this rule, like Mr. Elliot and Dr. Coues, are conspicuous by reason of their exceptional position. Not only this, but converts have been made in this country in other departments

of zoölogy, and its adherents include some eminent, and even "educated" naturalists abroad. Neither is it evident that its "baneful teachings" and "advocacy of illiteracy" have had, to any perceptible degree, any demoralizing influence upon the rising generation of naturalists, or perceptibly deteriorated the quality of their spelling when it has fallen to their lot to coin new names for the designation of newly discovered genera and species.

Because the acceptance of Canon XL is not universal among naturalists is no reason for its elimination from the Code; the progress it has made and the good that has already resulted from it is rather something for which we should be grateful. It is of course not compulsory, as no such rule can be arbitrarily enforced; nor can Mr. Elliot ever expect that any rule for even such a simple matter as the transliteration of Greek and other names into Latin, to say nothing of the construction of names according to undeviating methods, will ever be in universal use. It is even "Utopian" to expect all good spellers to spell alike. Therefore we may well rest content to tolerate in our Check-List a few malformations like *Leptotila* and *Pediocates*, and even such an inept name as *cafer* for an American bird, than to open wide the door to the vacillating sway of the horrified emender.

DESCRIPTION OF A NEW NORTH AMERICAN THRUSH.

BY HARRY C. OBERHOLSER.

THE OLIVE-BACKED THRUSHES inhabiting the Rocky Mountain region of the United States prove to be subspecifically separable from the eastern race, to which they have heretofore been referred. The name *swainsonii* has undoubted application to the form from eastern North America, since Cabanis states¹ the habitat of the

¹ Tschudi's Fauna Péruana, 1845-6, 190.